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LATE VICTORIAN EMBELLISHMENTS TO MARGATE

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'And the result promises to be that, soon upon the coast of Thanet, a town will stand, remarkable not only for the ecstasy of its invigorating breezes, but conspicuous also, among seaside towns, for the beauty and taste displayed in its internal economy and in the architecture of its streets and buildings.

That these are not empty words, anyone who has this year chosen Margate for his holiday jaunt and sees on every hand improvements which are daily nearer perfection will testify.'¹

This statement in *The Covent Garden Magazine* must have seemed like manna from heaven to the advocates of one of the most contentious of the improvements – the New Road. This was one scheme of the many which occupied the town during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Margate, like rivals such as Brighton and Folkestone, was faced with the task of improving its facilities to ensure the continued loyalty of its visitors as well as attempting to attract new holidaymakers. The emergence of a vast army of artisans and clerks with enough money to afford a week away at the seaside made competition between the existing resorts considerable. In addition to which, the emergence of new resorts as the railways expanded the distances that could be travelled with ease increased the competition. In Margate, there was a myriad of schemes and suggested improvements, ranging from the question of sewage and its disposal through to the siting of a gas works and the debate about a public tramway. The new road along the seafront was the cause of great discussion and disagreement within the community and especially within the Council and was to throw a shadow over future plans for improvements. In part, at least, this was due to the difficulty of financing any Council spending plans. Rates, then as now, were a

¹ *Keble's Gazette*, Saturday, 15th May, 1880, 5c.

sensitive issue and, inevitably, the ratepayers bore the brunt of any capital expenditure on town improvements.

In contrast, the construction of the Jubilee Clock Tower was, eventually, to prove a more healing experience for the town. It is a comment on the divisions over the 'new road' that the Town Council refused to have any hand in celebrating Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. It was left to a number of prominent and loyal citizens to organise and finance both the celebrations on the day in the town and the long-term mark of the town's loyalty to and affection for Her Majesty.

In the nineteenth century Margate was a well-known holiday resort, but the town still suffered from a narrow and rather ugly High Street and a parade which was certainly not extensive. Indeed, in 1799 the Parade was said to have 'little to boast of in respect to elegance or even cleanliness'.²

By 1875, Margate was also becoming a favourite day resort for Londoners. Its situation was ideal, being served by two railways, the South-Eastern Railway and the London, Chatham and Dover Railway. In 1878, the 3rd Class travel day excursion fare London to Margate was 5s., and 'at that time both companies carried during the season 12,000-18,000 passengers on day trips to Margate, and about 20,000 every Sunday'.³ In addition to the railways, there was also the steamboat by which the Londoner could travel from the heart of London to the sands of Margate and Ramsgate. There is some evidence that these boats offered serious competition to the trains.⁴

Margate could also be said to have benefited from nature. The natural sweep of the main bay from the point at Nayland Rock to the harbour was very attractive. The construction of a retaining sea-wall and the construction of a new road, linking Marine Terrace to Horn Point, would provide an attractive drive and walk as well as a pleasant sea view. The efforts being made by competitors like Brighton and Folkestone made it imperative for Margate to improve the amenities it had to offer the holidaymaker. This was especially the case, if it wished to continue to attract the 'better-class' visitor.

There was, therefore, some recognition in the town that changes needed to be made. Thus, in 1877, the Margate Extension and Improvement Bill was safely piloted through Parliament. This led on Tuesday, 12th March, to Margate Council receiving a Report from

² John K. Walton *The English Seaside Resort, A Social History 1750-1914* (1983), 114.

³ John Whyman, 'Kentish Railways: Their Construction and Impact', in *Cantium: A Magazine of Kent Local History*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (Winter 1973/4), 80.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.

the Road Building and Improvement Committee (previously it had been the Parliamentary Committee). The report recommended

'that the Council carry out the new road connecting the Marine Terrace with the Parade, according to the clauses 1 and 2 of the 29th section of the Margate Extension and Improvement Bill 1877, and that the necessary steps be at once adopted to proceed with the same and that the Surveyor have instructions to prepare the requisite plans and working drawings. Also that in connection with this work the necessary notices be issued for acquiring under the terms of the aforesaid Act all the properties from and including Horne Corner to and including the Globe Hotel together with the area required out of the Harbour, as shown on the accompanying plan.'⁵

Alderman Knight moved the adoption of the report, seconded by Councillor Reeve. The ensuing debate was long and detailed and was, in a strange way, a preview of what was to follow in the actual construction of the road. Councillor Pointon, the member for Marine Ward (that most closely concerned), stated that in 1852 Mr Goodale, the late Mayor, Mr Reeve and himself were appointed to a sub-committee to ascertain what improvements could be made in the High Street and to build a new road. The iron bridge was to be removed and a new road constructed; this plan had now been much improved in the Act. He considered that the plan should meet with approval; but he objected to the purchase of the Globe Hotel. From this, it is clear that the construction of some kind of new road had been under consideration for at least twenty-six years. The reference to the purchase of the Globe Hotel was important, as the hotel was to cause problems even after the completion and opening of the new road.⁶

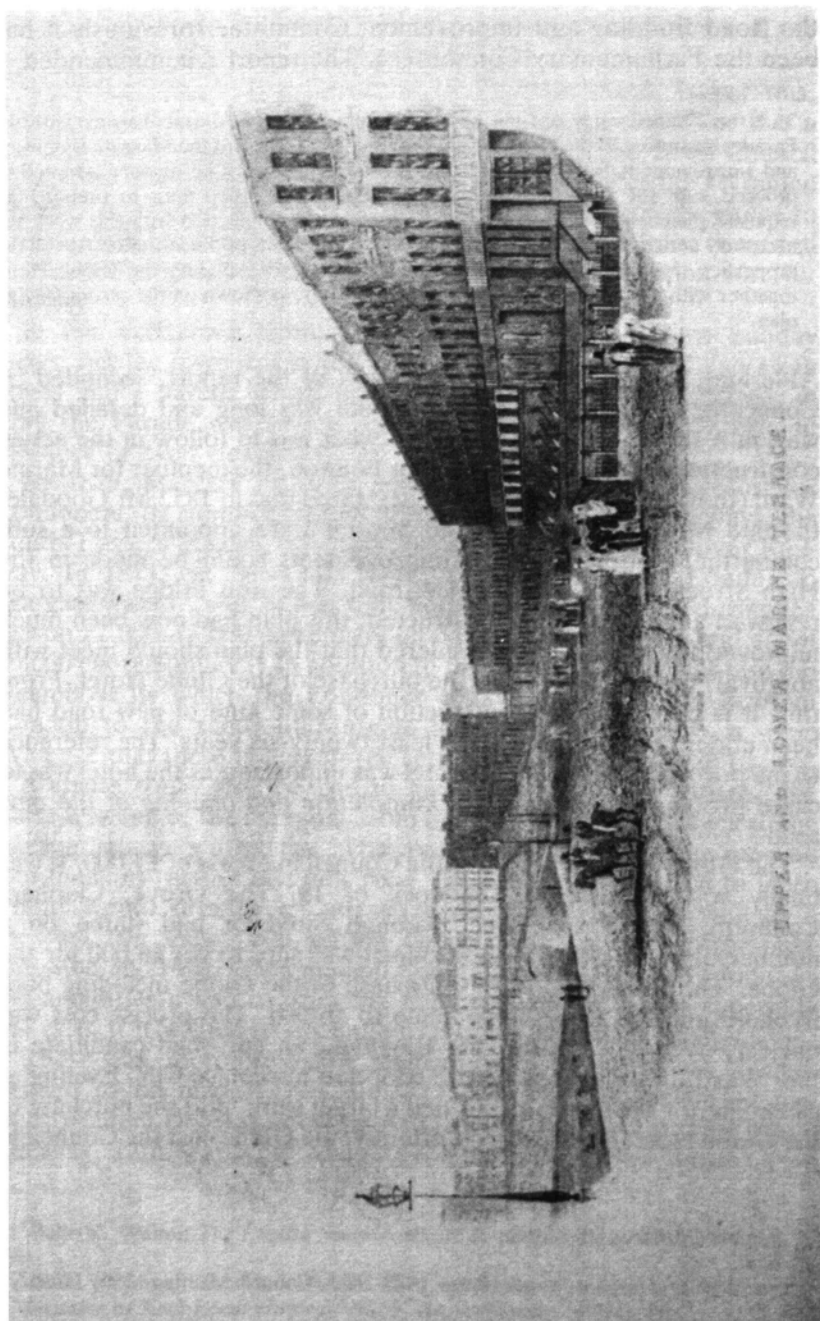
The Globe Hotel was to cost the Council in excess of £7,000. It was finally sold to Edward Craddock of 13, The Grove, Clapham Common, for £5,050.⁷ The Borough Surveyor had stated on a number of occasions that the Council was sure to get £6,000 for the Globe. The total costs of the purchase of the Globe including both freehold and the lease alone came to £6,500. The precise cost was unclear, even at the time. Mr Bloxham, an anti-road candidate in Pier Ward, in his speech before adoption to replace Cllr. Eveling as candidate for the ward, mentioned a larger sum: 'plus the purchase of the Globe Hotel for £8,000.'⁸ Certainly, the Globe cost the Council at

⁵ *Keble's Gazette*, 16th March, 1878, 2b.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Borough of Margate Minute Book 1878-1883*, Council Meeting, 25th January, 1881, 81.

⁸ *Keble's Gazette*, 18th October, 1879, 2a.



Upper and Lower Marine Terrace – Print c. 1840?

least £7,191.⁹ Eventually, they were able to sell it for a mere £5,050. Financing and the control of the money involved in the building of the road were extremely lax, if not criminally negligent. The disparity between projected costs of £18,000 and actual costs of £40,000 is impossible to explain adequately on the information now available.

Much ink, anguish and anger were expended in the town on the question of the financing of the new road. The original Act had allowed for the borrowing of £40,000 for the construction of the road. The Borough Surveyor believed that the road could be built for an estimated cost of '£18,000 – less or more'. Prophetically, Councillor Chambers interjected: 'it may be £40,000.' As reported in *Keble's Gazette*, Saturday, 16th March, 1878, nobody took any notice. Yet the building of the road became a saga of spend, spend and spend until, at the very last minute, the initial sum of money borrowed from the Alliance Insurance Company, £25,000, was all gone and the road far from completed. The initial loan of £25,000, had already added a noticeable burden to the rates, the exact amount being in dispute. (The loan was to be financed at 4 per cent per annum over 50 years, with half yearly repayments of £630 13s. 0d. including principal and interest, which was, according to Cllr. Munns, equal to a 5d. rate, but was, according to the Town Clerk, just over a 4d. rate.)¹⁰ Councillor Munns at the same Council meeting pointed out with some justice that: 'first it was £10,000 or £12,000 now it is £18,000, where will it all end?' He continued: 'because of the cost of the plan and because of the poverty of the inhabitants, I must vote against it.'¹¹

Mr Latham, the Margate Town Surveyor, had painted a picture of what a putative road might look like. It was a road which apparently linked the Parade via the Lower High Street to Marine Gardens, breaking through to the seafront near the King's Head, but it was not the road that was in fact contemplated by those in power. According to the editor of *Keble's Gazette*, it appeared that

'the painting as done by Mr Latham was an attempt to throw dust in the ratepayers' eyes. We know for the first time that the level road has been for years the favourite idea of the scientific, the far seeing and the most experienced, the beautiful picture was painted to deceive. We regret the Council has paid so little attention to the wishes of the burgesses.'¹²

In the same month the Council rejected the complaints of the

⁹ *Ibid.*, 17th January, 1880, 5bc.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 26th October, 1878, 6a.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 26th October, 1878, d.

¹² *Ibid.*, 24th August, 1878, Editorial, 5a.

ratepayers who had collected 1,200 signatures to a Memorial concerning the road and the payment of a sum of money to the Pier and Harbour Company. The sum involved was £4,000. It was to pay for the land and properties which stood at Horne Corner, £2,800 for the four tenanted cottages, £280 legal costs, leaving £920 for the section of the foreshore in the harbour which would be needed for the road.¹³ It was to transpire later that the money paid to the Pier and Harbour Company for the foreshore was a mistake, as a further £1,000 was paid to the Marquis of Conyngham, whose family held ancient rights to the foreshore of Thanet. Complaints in the Council concerning the payment of nearly £2,000 for the same piece of foreshore seem to have led nowhere. The Minute Books of the Pier and Harbour Company confirm the receipt of the £4,000 from the Council, which was invested by the Chancery Division of the High Court in India at 4 per cent.¹⁴ It would seem that no attempt was made to try to obtain the return from the Pier and Harbour Company of the £920 paid for the foreshore to which the company had no claim.

The Memorial was signed by a number of leading citizens, including the Vicar of Margate and Mr Cobb, together with a number of traders in the High Street. This objection was in part based on those traders' concern that a lower road would seriously affect their trade since people would no longer pass that way to and from Marine Terrace, but clearly, on the other hand, an element of the population was against the construction of the road, believing it to be too big and expensive a task for the Council and Mr Latham, the Borough Surveyor. As usual the local paper had a relevant comment

'If it be really thought that the new marine road as projected by the surveyor will be too serious an expense – let us adopt at once the less expensive improvement of simply widening The Parade. – Great and expensive works are better carried out when they are in sympathy with the public mind. – But in any case we ask for the most thorough public discussion of these questions. It is a great evil that they are debated so much in private or settled secretly in committee.'¹⁵

By January 1879, the work was beginning and the first invoice for payment of materials was received. The following month saw the first payments of wages as well as for materials, though it is interesting to note that the work was held up to some considerable extent, the Surveyor reporting that the 'considerable delay was caused by the

¹³ *Ibid.*, 22th February, 5a.

¹⁴ W.J. Mercer, *Extracts From The Minute Books of The Pier and Harbour Company 1862–1912*, 167.

¹⁵ *Keble's Gazette*, 3rd August, 1878, Editorial, 5b.

strike in the engineering trade in London; one of their cranes having broken, it had been sent to London to be repaired, and was kept there three weeks.' By mid-March, Cllr. Munns was providing some interesting information about the work and costs of the work on the new road which make fascinating reading.

'There were 79 persons employed, and 64 of these were paid not more than 5d. an hour, the highest being 8d. and only four or five received more than £2 a week. The greatest number of hours in the wages sheet – was 84½ in one week – only 16 hours per day. In the previous week he found one man working no less than 120 hours – that a man had worked for six consecutive days no less than 20½ hours per day. – but because it was a man – and a poor man, too – there was no man to interfere and prevent such slavery. He thought their officials should give some explanation.'¹⁶

Apart from a question from Cllr. Kendall as to whether the men were asked to work so long and the Mayor's response that they were not, the matter was dropped. Yet how was it possible for a man to work that length of time in the last days of February and the first weeks of March? Are these inflated hours to give a better wage for the workmen or is there some other explanation? The total lack of response in the Council shows either a callous disregard for the working man or some knowledge no longer available.

From March to June, the Council meetings were presented with a series of accounts of money spent on the road but not with the current total of overall costs. On Saturday, 5th July, *Keble's Gazette* carried the account of the monthly council meeting which showed that the Road Building and Improvement Committee was heading rapidly toward insolvency. Cllr. Munns, as ever, was to the fore asking whether there was enough money to execute the current recommendation to pay the outstanding bills of £4,999 9s. 7d. The Surveyor's answer was a form of sophistry: there was £1,000 left in the Bank since they had not yet paid the Victoria Bathing Rooms their money, plus the £6,000 for the Globe and the land attached to it, *if it were to be sold*. This was in addition to the circular that he had issued showing the cost of the road to have been £26,600, a rebate for £5,000 for sales, etc., leaving a net cost of £21,600.¹⁷ By 26th July, matters had come to a head. At a special meeting of the Town Council a resolution that would permit the Council to borrow an additional £5,000 which had been deferred from the previous week was discussed. According to Cllr. Bayly the sum needed would be £7,000. The actual sum needed became academic since when it was

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 15th March, 1879, 4d.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5th July, 1879, 5d.

put to the vote, the Council rejected the borrowing of any further money. Voting for were the Mayor, Alderman Fagg, Cllrs. Bayly, Davis, Eveling and Reeve; while voting against the idea of borrowing any further money were Aldermen Chambers and Kendall, Cllrs. Munns, Perry, Pointon, Poole, Searles and White.

It was at this same meeting that the question of relieving the Improvement Committee of their 'burden' was also discussed. It was finally decided that the oversight and control for all further work on the new road should be taken over by the Council acting in Committee. This was proposed by Cllr. Searles, his resolution being that no further loans would be allowed by the Council unless the expenditure of the same be in the hands of the Council in Committee. This motion was accepted unanimously. The Surveyor at this point asked the Council what he was to do; it was eventually decided that the work should continue to the end of the week. (This was the decision of the first meeting of the Council in Committee as reported in *Keble's Gazette*, Saturday 26th July, 1879).¹⁸

At the next monthly meeting of the Council, 29th July, 1879, there was much discussion and disagreement as to what should be done. A resolution recommended by the Council in Committee to continue with the new road was rejected unanimously. A longer and more restricted resolution was finally adopted after much discussion. This resolution allowed for the sea-wall to Horn Corner to be finished, and also for the filling in behind the wall as far as was needed. The resolution also stipulated that no further work was to be attempted without authorisation. At the same time an additional loan would be requested from the Cobb Bank of £3,000 which was to be charged to the General District Fund and would be borne by the rates.

Matters had come full circle. In January 1878, the Council had had some discussion over how the work on the new road was to be supervised. Some had wanted the Council to act in committee, while others had wanted to give supervision to a small committee so that the regular reports of that committee, being given in the Council, would enable the local ratepayers and citizens to have some idea of what was happening. Indeed, the leader in *Keble's Gazette* (Saturday, 26th January) had been specific:

'It was decided on the motion of Alderman Pickering to appoint a small committee to report upon these matters, but we cannot help expressing regret that efforts were made to relegate the matter to a committee of the whole council. This unconstitutional mode of conducting public business was a very favourite one a few years ago, and the result was very prejudicial to the public interests, as it really means a

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 26th July, 1879, 6a-c.

deliberation in private without the public having an opportunity of knowing what was done. – We were in hopes that the pernicious practices had been abandoned by the Council, but there appears to be a lingering affection for it [*sic*].'¹⁹

Yet clearly the small committee supervising the work was now deemed inadequate as the cost of the road was obviously completely out of control and the small group of men who constituted the committee had little apparent conception of what control and supervision meant. Such a situation only strengthened the hands of those who had wanted, at the beginning of the whole process, to put the work out to tender rather than leave it under the control of the town surveyor, Mr Latham. The small Improvement Committee had been totally unable to exercise any real financial constraint on construction costs, while the Surveyor had had no financial or time limits to work to. Were men like Mr Bayly as lax in financial control of their own businesses as they had been over Council business? It is interesting to note that the Council, at this time, consisted of a number of shopkeepers, hotel owners, auctioneers and house agents who were often also insurance agents. Were they as inefficient in the control of their own businesses as they were in keeping some control over the rate-payers' money? Even the Town Surveyor was doing work outside his Council employment; he had an office in Cecil Square for non-Council activities.

The lack of any real desire on the part of the majority of the Council to put the new road either to competition for design, or out to tender for construction raised and raises serious questions about the concepts and attitudes of the men involved in local government. That a new road was necessary was not disputed, but the manner of design and construction gave the impression of a small group of influential men riding roughshod over the feelings and opinions of the ratepayers of the town; they knew and they alone knew what was necessary. As Councillor Munns said in Council on 7th October, 1879:

'if this had been in the hands of a contractor, he would have taken care to have got the cheapest labour, and would have got the work done more expeditiously, as he would have begun both ends together. As to expedition the road had been just twelve months in hand, and he really did not see when they were likely to see the end of it – he hoped the oldest of the burgesses would live to see the day when it should be finished.'²⁰

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 26th January, 1878, Leader, 5c.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 11th October, 1879, 6a–c.

It was at this same council meeting that a further £7,000 had to be borrowed to provide for the progress of the works on the new road. This additional money was to be a further charge on the General District Rate. Apart from the comments of Cllr. Searles and similar remarks by Cllr. Munns, the loan was passed without comment with merely one dissident.

By the 18th October, the local newspaper was reporting a meeting of Pier Ward to choose a new candidate for the Council. A ward election was necessary because of the resignation of Cllr. Eveling. In the speeches made at this meeting, some reaction on the part of ratepayers can be seen. A Mr Ryan, in proposing Mr Bloxham, claimed that:

'the day of class legislation was over, both in the House of Commons and in this Borough; they were now left in the slough of despond [*sic*] by the aristocracy of the town, and having been deceived – the burgesses should now send in a man who was suitable from intellect alone, and not merely from position.'

He was seconded by Mr E. Wootton, who went on to make several points about Mr Eveling.

'having gone into the Council with many promises, – that he would be ruled by the voice of the people; and yet he had worked for the new road against their wishes and the only thing in which he had been consistent was the support of the road.'

Mr Bloxham in his speech went further back to the Act by which the Council had acquired 'certain ill-defined powers – almost under false pretences.' He was also very unhappy about the purchase of the Globe Hotel, which he claimed had cost £8,000.²¹ On the other hand, *Keble's Gazette* of the following Saturday, 25th October, 1879, states that the only contest for the Council took place in Cecil and Cliftonville Wards. If opposition to the new road in the town had been so great, surely there should have been more contests in the wards. The divisions which existed within the Council over the vexed question of the road came to a head after the elections. The Mayor of the last two years, Mr Wood, J.P., received no vote of thanks from his fellow councillors on his retirement, an unusual and rather unpleasant situation. Though the vote was proposed by Cllr. Bayly, there was no seconder. The only clue to what was going on is a cryptic comment made by Cllr. Searles on a statement that he claimed Mr Wood had made claiming that he had retired from the contest "because he did not wish to associate with those in public, with

²¹ *Ibid.*, 18th October, 1879, 2a.

whom he would not associate in private;" that was what he said of gentlemen who the burgesses sent to be members of the Council.²²

That the new road was at the root of this quarrel would seem certain; the leader in the *Keble's Gazette* of Saturday, 1st November, states:

'why was not an open court held to discuss it in detail, and the plans submitted to general inspection? It was wrong to delegate all the power – to a small committee – [who] were irresponsible, and would complete the new road and everything belonging to it in accordance with their own private, though united, views.'²³

Mr Wood when Mayor had been a member of that committee, together with Aldermen Fagg and Pointon and Cllrs. Bayly and Walton. The subsequent report of a 'Complimentary Banquet' given for the ex-Mayor and attended by a long list of local luminaries, including Sir James Bowyer, one of the two east Kent M.P.s, with a letter of apology from Sir Moses Montefiore for his inability to attend because he was confined to his room, gave a further indication of divisions within the town.²⁴

At the Council meeting after the local ward elections on Saturday, 15th November, Cllr. Searles proposed that the Road and Building and Improvement Committee be split into two bodies, the Improvement Committee being constituted by the whole Council.²⁵ The acceptance of this resolution meant that not only the new road but also the widening of the High Street was effectively taken out of the public's knowledge – the very thing that *Keble's* editor had been worried about at the beginning of the new road scheme.

Additionally, a new difficulty emerged: who actually had the right to the foreshore in the harbour area? The Council had paid £4,000 to the Pier and Harbour Company, £920 of which was for the foreshore in the harbour for the new road. At a special meeting of the Town Council had purchased the foreshore from the Marquis of Conyngham (foreshore from the western boundary of the Borough to nyngham (foreshore from the western boundary of the Borough to the north side of Broadstairs Pier). The price paid for the west portion to Margate pier was £1,000. The remainder was to be purchased by valuation. It was Cllr. Perry who raised the inevitable query '£4,000 paid to the Pier and Harbour Company who appear to have had no claim.'²⁶ The Mayor's response was that that was a

²² *Ibid.*, 15th November, 1879, 5cd.

²³ *Ibid.*, 1st November, 1879, Leader, 4e.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 29th November, 1879, 5cd, 8ab.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 15th November, 1879, 5cd.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 13th December, 1879, 2a.

matter for subsequent consideration. The meeting degenerated into a noisy, uncontrolled discussion which the Mayor, in the Chair, was unable to control. Indeed, he was forced to terminate the spectacle by withdrawing and ending the Council meeting.

The danger of the Council in Committee was demonstrated when, in January, Cllr. Munns, by use of a resolution in the full Council, brought matters into the open. In proposing a resolution concerning the 'filling in of the new Marine Drive', he opened the way for an extensive and wide-ranging discussion which perforce revealed to the general public what had been going on behind closed doors. There was an admission that no decision had been taken as to the width of the new road. There were the complex problems of what should front the land side of the road and whether any foundations should be laid. There was the difficult question of whether the shop keepers in the High Street should be given shop fronts along the new road and the difficulty of the Council having thus possibly improved the value of their businesses. This was a particularly awkward question, as some of the Councillors had shops in the High Street. Thus, the help of an outsider had been decided upon. This gentleman, Mr Chadwick, had submitted his written report to the Council that very morning. Even Mr Chadwick, however, was not immune from suspicion by the anti-road faction. Cllr. Munns was concerned at his connection with the Pier and Harbour Company and questioned his independence. There was some distrust of the Company within the town which was compounded by the fact that most of those closely connected with and supporters of the new road, were also supporters of the Company or connected with it in some capacity. There was still the outstanding question of the foreshore payment and the fact that the company had insisted on the payment of full fees for all the landfill and other materials for the road which had been landed by ship, as the vast majority had.

A second report was given to the Councillors at that meeting. This was the one which had been demanded in November 1879 from the Surveyor. The breakdown of the costs for the road shows clearly the sums paid, but at no time are there any quantities given. The looseness of this could easily have led to accusations of dishonesty or at least considerable slackness.²⁷

On Tuesday, 20th January, the Mayor called a special Council meeting. There was prolonged discussion about the new road. Matters had, to a great extent, been precipitated by the presentation of a Public Health Certificate from Mr Knight Trevers (Medical Officer) stating:

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 17th January, 1880, 2bc, 5b-e.

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'that the portion of the new road not yet filled in, formed a receptacle for the sewage of the houses abutting onto it, constitutes a nuisance that is dangerous to health, the unfilled portion is imperfectly flushed, and is of the nature of an open cesspool, and in the warm weather will become very dangerous to the public health.'

The question of sewage had been raised on the 17th January, when it was stated that although the sewage was piped to the sea, the longer piping prevented the tides from clearing the pipes, often resulting in a lake of sewage collected in that part of the road which had not yet been filled in. Nothing having been done about the matter at the earlier meeting, it was left to Mr Knight Trevers to force the issue. Eventually, the Council accepted a following resolution 'that the Surveyor be instructed to forthwith prepare an estimate of the total sum required to complete a road 70 ft. wide, and that the question of the disposal of the surplus land be left until the works are complete.'²⁸ From this point on, there is little mention of the road until the formal opening ceremony in May.

Even this was spoilt by the odd behaviour of the Council in not announcing any details of the opening, almost as if they were ashamed of what had been built, or perhaps it was to prevent the advocates of the road from indulging in expensive celebration and self-congratulation. As *Keble's Gazette* explained:

'Divided Councils moved the Corporation as to what should be done in connection with the opening of the road. In consequence of this variety of opinion, no information was afforded outsiders as to times and places and the assembled crowds waited some two hours-and-a-half before they had the pleasure of witnessing the scant ceremonial which graced the occasion. In fact some of the details were only arranged a few minutes before their actual occurrence.'²⁹

So loose were the arrangements that the Mayor, stopping at The Kent to open the road, was overtaken by the East Kent Mounted Rifles (163 strong) led by Lieutenant-Colonel the Right Honourable the Earl of Guildford and Major the Most Honourable the Marquis of Ormonde. When all the troops were on the new road, the Earl halted them and the Mayor drove to their head to give his address. He simply declared the road open. They all then continued to the Parade, where they dispersed.

The road had been built, but clearly at a cost which some at least considered too great. The Council had shown itself to be little different from many other local councils. The very fact that the council meetings took place during the day made it inevitable that

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 24th January, 1880, 5bc.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 22nd May, 1880, 8ab.

only those with the opportunity to be free at such a time could stand for the Council. The lack of a local, important and wealthy landowning aristocrat, as for example Lord Radnor in Folkestone, made it possible for a small clique of local shop-owners and insurance agents to monopolise the council. They were hardly the men of vision needed to enable Margate to compete successfully with the emergence of Folkestone and the continued success of Brighton. Margate, though constructing apace a more select area at Cliftonville, was beginning the move into becoming the playground of the lower classes. Given the communications and the relevant nearness to London, this may well have been inevitable. It was almost certainly helped by the attitude of the Council and, indeed, many of the ratepayers, who disliked any increase in their rates. Yet it was in the town's interest to attempt to lengthen the season, which was only fourteen weeks and which could only have been done if they could have attracted the 'better sort' to the town. In competition with the elegance and provisions of Brighton, Margate came a very poor second. The failure of the council to add attractive new buildings and gardens at the time of the new road was unfortunate but, given the limits of their vision and their poor leadership within the town, was perhaps inevitable. It was unfortunate, however, that the local paper was able to draw attention to the ugly side of the new Marine Drive, quoting from the magazine *Society*:

'The new Marine Drive improvements have brought into full view the backs of certain shanties which formerly overhung the waves or sand, as the case might be, according to the state of the tide. Now if the local magistrates be wise, they will clear away these eyesores and excrescences before the season of Margate sets in. [There are] sundry rumours to the effect of replacing the shanties with shops. If the L.M. [*sic* – Local Magistrates?] be wise, they will allow nothing of the kind to be done. To make the new esplanade really beautiful it should be thrown open to the High Street, and the centre laid out as a lawn and planted with shrubs. [They] might design a fountain for the lawn, an ornamental platform for the band. A row of shops on the esplanade would prove a great mistake.'³⁰

The Council seemed determined to learn from the experience of the construction of Marine Drive. Thus, when it came to the celebrations for Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, 21st June, 1887, the Council was not in any way officially involved. The entire celebration, the children's party, the tea for the retired and elderly and the firework display, as well as the permanent memorial, were all to be financed and controlled through the voluntary principle. In such a way, the Council would not have to increase the rates as they had

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 26th June, 1880, 5c.

had to do to build Marine Drive. The Mayor, Henry F. Hermitage, was clearly determined to see that the town did something and so arranged for a public meeting to be held to discuss the matter. This meeting would seem to have been widely advertised, including the use of posters. It was also helpful that the Mayor was able to hold the meeting at the Town Hall.

At this meeting, which was attended by a great number of men from the area, including the M.P. for Thanet, the Right Honourable Colonel King Harman, various ideas for a permanent memorial were suggested, the first being 'that in the opinion of this meeting a Clock Tower erected at the foot of the Marine Terrace Green will be a suitable permanent memorial.' This was proposed by Mr A.B. Cobb, and seconded by Mr W. Leerham, J.P. An amendment was proposed by Mr Eveling, seconded by W. Coleman 'the Memorial should take the shape of Alms Houses or Jubilee Cottages for the use of widows or spinsters who had been 50 years in the town.' A second amendment was proposed by S. Hawkins and seconded by J. Hudson Jr. 'that this meeting is of the opinion that in Her Majesty's Jubilee year measures should be taken to acquire the interest of the Pier and Harbour for the benefit of the town.' The first amendment was lost by a 'large majority', while the second was withdrawn. The opinion of the meeting was that the cost of cottages would be at least £10,000, clearly raising a doubt as to whether such a sum could be collected. Any attempt to gain control of the Pier and Harbour Company would have cost even more than this sum. It is, however, an indication of the feeling of some in the town that the Company did not always act in the interests of the town – the foreshore question was not forgotten. The same report in *Keble's Gazette* contains an enlightening and interesting statement made by Mr Latham with regard to the proposition by Mr Cobb of a clock tower and 'getting it done'

'if proposed by Mr. Cobb [there is] a fair way of having it carried out.'³¹

The Cobb family contributed £600 of the £2,098 16s. 0d. received.³² What is clear is that, once again, a group of prominent citizens had obviously made their decision before any meeting took place – a clock tower was to be the town's memorial of the Jubilee.

The public meeting then went on to form a General Committee to carry out the previous resolutions and with power to co-opt additional members from five listed groups. It is important to note

³¹ *Ibid.*, 19th February, 1887, 5b-e.

³² *Margate Jubilee Committee* Donations Already Promised List.

that the Honorary Treasurer was Mr A.B. Cobb, an indication that the Cobb and Co. Bank clearly played an important role in Margate's affairs at this period, whether by lending the Council thousands of pounds to help in additional financing of the Marine Drive or acting as bankers and backers to the Jubilee effort of the Mayor.

At a General Committee meeting on Monday, 27th February, the Mayor reported having sent a printed copy of the resolutions passed at the public meeting to 'every gentleman' on the committee. Amongst the letters in reply had been one with a donation of £500 from the firm of Cobb and Co., together with a further personal donation from Mr Francis Carr Cobb of £100, and a letter from Col. King Harman, M.P. A vote of thanks to the Cobbs was proposed by the Mayor, seconded by Mr W. Pointon, 'for their munificent subscription'.³³ It was also agreed that competitive designs for a clock tower should be obtained, but further consideration of the matter was adjourned until the next meeting, when it was hoped that they would have a clearer idea of the money that could be devoted to it.

At the subsequent meeting of the General Committee it was decided to appoint two committees, one for Entertainments and the other for the Clock Tower. The Clock Tower Committee consisted of 12 members – Mr F.M. Cobb, several councillors and at least one solicitor, Mr T.H. Boys, as well as the Mayor, Alderman Henry Hermitage.³⁴ It was also agreed 'that the Town Council be asked for a description as to the site for the proposed tower.'

During this period, the Clock Tower Committee had had printed and circulated announcements of the competition for a design for the Clock Tower. Yet there is no record of this, either in the Committee Book or in the local papers. The Committee Book does, however, contain a copy of the announcement. The time given for the submission of designs from the date of announcement was 28 days, not a long period unless those who wished to submit a design had one ready. There must have been at least one Clock Tower Committee meeting to discuss the terms of the competition, in particular the decision to impose a limit of £800 for the cost of construction. Or was this, once again, an example of a small group deciding, or an example of the secretary to the Committee, Mr Foord-Kelcey, who was also Town Clerk, being overworked with Town Council duties and unable to keep full written accounts of the meetings?

At a General Committee Meeting on 21st April, the Chairman

³³ *Margate Jubilee Committee Book*, General Committee Meeting, Monday, 27th February, 1887.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, General Committee Meeting, Friday, 11th March, 1887.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Clock Tower Committee Meeting, Saturday, 30th April, 1887.

reported that the Town Council had given permission for the use of the site on Marine Terrace for the proposed Clock Tower. Volunteers were also organised to collect subscriptions throughout the town now that the site of the tower was known.

Some sense of urgency showed itself on Saturday, 30th April. The Committee meeting at the Town Hall at 8 p.m. was to organise the choice of a design. It was announced that Mr Fagg (previously Cllr. Fagg at the time of the Marine Drive) was 'willing to allow the Long Room at the White Hart Hotel to be used during the following week for exhibiting the designs at the small charge of Two Pounds [*sic*] for the week.'³⁵ This offer was accepted by the Committee. It was also arranged that the Clock Tower Committee should meet at the White Hart on Monday, 2nd May, to arrange the designs and that the General Committee be called together at 4 o'clock on Monday at the hotel. On Tuesday and Wednesday, both subscribers and the general public would be invited to inspect the designs between the hours of 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. and 3 and 5 p.m. The Clock Tower Committee would meet at the hotel at 6 o'clock on Thursday, 5th May, to make their final decision.

The General Committee meeting at the White Hart moved the resolution

'That the Clock Tower Committee be empowered to select three designs and that the General Committee be then called together for the purposes of making the final selection therefrom.'³⁶

Sixty-three entries were received. The reporter writing of the exhibition at the White Hart in *Keble's Gazette*, Saturday, 7th May, 1887, seemed disappointed at this number of entries since 'the applications for particulars were more than double that number.' From the same source, it is clear that those members of the public who went to see the designs exhibited were somewhat at a loss to understand them since there were no drawings of the completed towers, merely the working designs.³⁷ Although the reporter was disappointed with the response, the Committee given the task of selection realised that one sitting would not suffice. Instead of meeting on the Thursday alone, they in fact also met on Wednesday, 4th May.

Their first decision was not to include four designs which had arrived late. They then set about the task of making a first elimination, whereby they retained 22 designs for further consideration. The meeting of the Committee on Thursday was better attended,

³⁶ *Ibid.*, General Committee Meeting, Monday, 2nd May, 1887.

³⁷ *Keble's Gazette*, 7th May, 5b.

with 11 members present as opposed to the previous meeting's nine. Three rounds of elimination were proceeded with, leaving three designs, nos. 10, 48 and 49 – 'Artz, Karl and Encor ut Vincan'.³⁸ Each of these designs represented a different style of architecture according to a subsequent report in *Keble's Gazette*. The selection process was carried out without anyone on the Committee having any idea of the architect involved in any of the designs.

The final decision was taken by the General Committee held at the White Hart with 35 members present. This would appear to have been a rather animated and exciting meeting. Design 48 was eliminated since only the design had been submitted but no 'conditions'. Cllr. Head then proposed that the design no. 10 be eliminated, seconded by Mr Boys. The question put to the vote resulted in the following:

'For the Resolution 13
Against the Resolution 14'

The minutes continue with a reference to 'several gentlemen having intimated that a misunderstanding had arisen in the matter of the vote'.³⁹ There was clearly some rather intense discussion. In order to overcome this disagreement as to who had voted for what, it was determined that a physical vote was needed. Those wishing to keep no. 10 as the chosen design going to the south end of the room, while those wishing to retain design no. 49 went to the north end of the room. It must have been an interesting sight, especially as the result was a tie. It was left to the Mayor, as the Chairman, to use his casting vote in favour of design 49. The choice of no. 49 was moved and unanimously approved. The Town Clerk (Mr Foord-Kelcey) then opened the envelope to discover the name of the architect. It was Mr Ernest Kaufman, 158, Sinclair Road, West Kensington. The Committee, now they had the details, had the exact site of the Clock Tower marked out on Marine Gardens on the following Wednesday, much to the interest of people in the town.⁴⁰

At the next meeting of the Clock Tower Committee, Mr Kaufman was present. Almost immediately problems began. It transpired that though niches were shown on the design, they were not included in the costs and conditions. After Mr Kaufman had withdrawn from the meeting considerable discussion took place and it was decided that he should be asked to submit specifications and working drawings before

³⁸ *Margate Jubilee Committee Book*, Clock Tower Committee Meeting, Thursday, 5th May, 1887.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, General Committee Meeting, Friday, 6th May 1887.

⁴⁰ *Keble's Gazette*, 14th May, 1887, 5b.

the invitation of tenders. It is clear from the minutes that already there is some hesitancy with regard to Mr Kaufman's plans since the Committee felt it necessary to pass a resolution making it clear that Mr Kaufman would have no claim on the Committee should the estimates for construction exceed the sum laid down in the conditions of the competition. Such a resolution was unusual, especially as the terms of the competition had been clear.⁴¹

The meeting of 3rd June was attended by Mr Kaufman, who brought his working drawings and specifications. The Committee decided to submit these to an independent architect for his advice on sufficiency and practicability, as had been made clear in the initial advertisement announcing the competition. A Mr Beazley, F.R.S.B.A., was suggested as the independent architect. Mr Kaufman undertook 'to write his consent to the proposal'. What the precise problems were is unclear from the minutes. Three and a half weeks elapsed before the next meeting. The minutes contain cryptic references to a letter received from Mr Kaufman and correspondence between Mr Lacey, Mr Kaufman and Mr Beazley. A draft letter of reply to Mr Kaufman was submitted to the Committee for approval, which was unanimous. Unfortunately, the contents of none of these letters appear in the Committee's Minutes.

By the middle of July, Mr Beazley had informed the Committee that in his opinion

'plans and specifications were not sufficiently explicit to enable a builder to make a proper contract and that the work could not be carried out for less than £1,500.'⁴²

The Committee requested Mr Kaufman to revise the specification and the drawings and 'completing them to the satisfaction of Mr Beazley within a fortnight'.

The changes made must have been acceptable since, at the next recorded meeting, the plans had been handed to Messrs. Stoner and Sons as quantity surveyors. The problems of the Committee were not over, however, since at the same meeting there was mention of the difficulty of collecting money which had already been promised. By October, the Committee was comparing the current working drawings with the original design and had found that details from the original were missing! By November, the omissions to the value of £50 and additions to the value of £25 had been established. It was resolved, however, to proceed with the tendering for the erection of

⁴¹ *Margate Jubilee Committee Book*, Clock Tower Committee Meeting, Tuesday, 10th May, 1887.

⁴² *Ibid.*, Clock Tower Committee Meeting, Monday, 18th July, 1887.

the tower in the following week's papers. Careful as ever, the Council resolved 'That the builder be required to give security to the Committee to the amount of a sum not under £300.'⁴³

The receipt of tenders made it clear that within the terms of the competition the cost was too high, so 'the arrangements made with the Committee concerning his plan will not be further proceeded with.'⁴⁴ Mr Kaufman was tenacious and had to be told in a further letter, sent on the instructions of the Committee, that they declined to continue further with the matter and they also stated that any further correspondence would be futile. At the same time, Mr Beazley was requested to advise them as to their present position.

Mr Beazley now took on an important role. The Committee clearly did not want another wasted choice. He, therefore, went through the re-submitted designs, advising the Committee on their construction costs. By March, he had 'selected two designs likely to be carried out within the limits of £800.'⁴⁵ Financial restraint, therefore, in reality, had taken selection out of the hands of the Committee, who on 20th March accepted his recommendation of the design of Mr Cheers. By the end of March a meeting between Mr Cheers, the Committee Hon. Secretary and Mr Beazley had cleared up any difficulties. Mr Cheers had agreed to some small alterations to his design and assured the Committee that his design had not been executed anywhere else and would promise that it would not be reproduced, if constructed at Margate.

A General Committee meeting (27th March) accepted the explanation of the difficulties over design 49, the high cost of tenders, the obligation to reject the design, the resubmission of 38 of the 'old' designs and the recommendation of Mr Beazley. The Committee went on to ask the Clock Tower Committee to carry out the necessary work on its foundations, construction and to organise the purchase of a clock, chimes, and all other matters concerned with completing the building.

By 4th July, it had been decided that the tower was to be built in worked Kentish ragstone rather than Portland stone. This meant that the lower half of the Tower up to the shelf below the clock faces would be worked Kentish ragstone, while the stonework above would be in Portland stone. Dotts and Son of Leeds had received the contract to provide the clocks, and tenders had been received after advertisements had been placed in *The Builder* and the local papers.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, Clock Tower Committee Meeting, Friday, 18th November, 1887.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Clock Tower Committee, Tuesday, 3rd January, 1888.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, Saturday, 10th March, 1888.

Everything was at last going well. Mr Cheers was easy to work with and the tenders had been reasonable, with three coming within the stated limit of £880, which had become the new limit. The Committee awarded the contract to Ring Brothers of South Norwood. The architect had undertaken to supervise the work of construction, thus avoiding the necessity of employing a clerk of the works. The Clock Tower Committee had appointed a Committee of Specification and a Committee of Inspection. Both these committees had the same members, Alderman F. Hermitage, Mr F. Edwards and Mr J. Reeve, in order to both expedite the work and simplify the supervision of it when in progress. Everything seemed, at last, to be going smoothly. It was an illusion since, by 16th July, the minutes show that

Ring Brothers had not replied initially to the letter offering them the job of construction. A second letter elicited the reply – to the effect that there had been a clerical error – and they wished to withdraw the estimate.⁴⁶

There was 'considerable discussion' and it was resolved that further consideration of the question be adjourned until Tuesday, 17th July. At this meeting, there was a report of the 'Deputation's interview with Mr Pearce'. Clearly, a small group of the Committee went to see Mr Pearce about his tender, the second lowest. Whether the group was self-appointed or not is unclear from the minutes. In any event, as a result of this initiative, it was moved that Mr Pearce's tender be accepted subject to his entering into a proper contract and giving a security of £300. The architect's fee for supervision would be 25 guineas. The Committee accepted these terms.

All was ready to begin, and, on Thursday 26th July, Mr Pearce quite innocently caused considerable consternation in the town:

'Some surprise was caused by preparations being made for the erection of the Jubilee Clock Tower on the Marine Terrace. The scaffolding was erected, but a petition was at once prepared and signed by over 40 persons asking the Council to put a stop to the work until after the season. A considerable amount of feeling was excited at the steps taken in commencing the work at this time of the year, and the work has been stopped and the scaffolding removed this [Friday] morning.'⁴⁷

The Committee's travails were not over, however, since in September an effort was made in the Town Council to stop the construction of the Clock Tower altogether. The feelings of the Committee can only be guessed at, but the secretary had stuck into the minutes

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Monday, 16th July, 1888.

⁴⁷ *Keble's Gazette*, 28th July, 1888, 5c.

(Friday, 21st September) at the relevant place a cutting giving all the details of the Council meeting which had discussed the whole question of the Clock Tower. At the same Council meeting, a Memorial was presented from the residents of Marine Terrace and others asking the Council not to sanction the commencement of the work on the Clock Tower until after the end of the first week in October. This same Memorial went on to ask that a new site 'might be found' for the Tower since if erected where planned it might do 'considerable injury' to lodging-house keepers in the neighbourhood. Perhaps the lodging-house keepers had the same worries as Mr Paramor, who was quoted by Alderman Hermitage at the Council meeting as having had the intention of signing the Memorial because, living as he did in Grosvenor Villas,

"he would hear the clock chime and it would disturb his night's rest."

This comment relayed by the Alderman to the council caused some laughter. What emerges from the account of the council meeting was vacillation and inconsistency. The council had, on 19th April, 1887, granted permission for the Clock Tower and the placing of it on Marine Terrace Road. There had been no votes against and only one abstention. As a result of the Memorial and discussion at the later council meeting, in September 1888, the council divided almost equally on the motion to rescind council permission for construction of the Clock Tower, seven including the Mayor voting against the rescinding motion and five voting to rescind permission. The Council agreed to the original site being retained and the postponement of the beginning of the work until 15th October. The same Committee meeting was also informed that the South-Eastern Railway Company had agreed to allow their station yard to be used for the preparation of the stone for the tower – to avoid taking up too much space on Marine Terrace.

By November, work was finally in hand and the architect was demanding a decision, previously put off, with regard to the medallions on the tower. The Committee resolved to order three medallions of the 'best' type with the Heads of the Queen, the Prince and the Princess of Wales with the fourth space used, subject to the approval of the architect for a 'suitable inscription in terra cotta'. There was also the need for the architect's comments on the desirability of iron gates on the doorway of the tower.

At the end of April 1889, Doulton, who were happy to announce that the medallions were nearly complete, claimed that they were so busy they could not send a man down to affix them, but the Committee insisted they did so. Mr G.T. Chandler had been

appointed by the Committee at a fee of three guineas for the task of the three-monthly winding of the clock and to be responsible for looking after it once it was in place. The question of the handing over of the tower to the Council had now become paramount. Mr Boys moved, and Mr Cobb seconded that

'the Committee will be prepared to ask the Council to accept the Clock Tower and ask that a small committee should be formed to co-operate with this committee to carry out the necessary arrangements.'⁴⁸

At the subsequent Council meeting, the letter sent by the Clock Tower Committee was read, the Mayor responding with the comment that

'there could only be one opinion about the very handsome structure and addition to the town which had been put up on the Marine Terrace.'⁴⁹

The Council then went on to appoint the necessary committee. Cllr. Hawkins also expressed the hope that the Committee would be very careful that there should be no permanent charges made in the arrangements of 'the taking of the clock tower over'.

A meeting of the General Committee authorised the Clock Tower Committee to make all the necessary arrangements for the handing over to the town and to deal with any questions that might arise. Messrs A. Cutlack and Jones were requested to act as auditors on behalf of subscribers, and a vote of thanks was passed expressing 'great appreciation of the result of the labours' of the Clock Tower Committee.

A joint meeting between the Clock Tower Committee and the committee appointed by the Council took place on May 15th. The Mayor made it known that the committee was prepared to recommend the acceptance by the Corporation of the Clock Tower and it was moved by the Clock Tower Committee that they hand over the tower to the Council of the Borough on 24th May, the Queen's birthday. The ceremony duly took place on that date. The Committee's work was nearly done. At a meeting on 4th June the subscription lists and accounts were examined by the accountants and the balance sheet was signed and sent to *Keble's Gazette* for publication.

The attractive results of the Marine Drive and the Jubilee Clock Tower can be seen in Plate II. The comparison of control over

⁴⁸ *Margate Jubilee Committee Book*, Friday, 21st September, 1888.

⁴⁹ *Keble's Gazette*, 4th May, 1889, 5d.



The Marine Drive and Clock Tower, Margate, 1888, taken from *The Album of Margate Views*.

construction costs as exerted by the Council and the Jubilee Committee is equally clear. Both Cllrs. Searles and Munns were right in having wanted an outside surveyor and properly tendered estimates for the new road construction. The size of the project and its cost would then have been clear to everyone (and Marine Drive would not have been built). The presence and advice of Mr Beazley ensured the construction of the Clock Tower within cost. The refusal of the Council to make any arrangements for the Jubilee indicated a sudden concern for economy combined with a narrow shop-keeper mentality which augured ominously for Margate's future in the competitive seaside resort market.

The speech made by the Mayor when accepting the Clock Tower on behalf of the Corporation was typical in its clear pride in Margate, while at the same time showing how divided the town was over such matters of improving the town:

'We can boast of one of the most magnificent sweeps of drive from the railway stations of any seaside resort in the country. Canon Benham [an earlier Vicar of Margate] has compared our bay to a miniature Naples. – I have only one misgiving in regard to this work [the clock tower]: it is the misgiving arising from all men speaking well of it. From being the best abused, it has now become the most highly praised public object in the town. I am afraid that even that popular and never-erring body, the Town Council, at one time gave it the cold shoulder. Now we find the members, I am pleased to say, ready to receive it with pleasure; and well they may, for really it is a monument of which any corporation might rejoice to be the guardians.'⁵⁰

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 25th May, 1889, 2c.